

The Invasion of Italy

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tyrant. His profligacy was shameless and excessive, even for those licentious times. Eusebius tells the story of how Sophronia, the Christian wife of the city praefect, stabbed herself in order to escape his embraces, when the imperial messengers came to summon her to the palace.

If Maxentius had been accused of all the vices only on the authority of the Christian authors and the official panegyrists of Constantine, their statements might have been received with some suspicion—for a fallen Roman Emperor had no friends. Zosimus, however, is almost as severe upon him as Lactantius, and Julian, in the *Banquet of the Ccesars*, excludes him from the feast as one utterly unworthy of a place in honourable society. According to Aurelius Victor, he was the first to start the practice of exacting from the senators large sums of money in the guise of free gifts (*tnunerum specie*) on the flimsiest pretexts of public necessity, or as payment for the bestowal of office or civil distinction. Moreover, knowing that, sooner or later, he would find himself at war with one or other of his brother Augusti, Maxentius amassed great stores of corn and wealth and took no heed of a morrow which he knew that he might not live to witness. He despoiled the temples,—says the author of the Ninth Panegyric,—butchered the Senate, and starved the people of Rome. The Praetorians—who had placed and kept him on the throne—ruled the city. Zosimus tells the curious story of how, in the course of a great fire in Rome, the Temple of Fortune was burned down and one of the soldiers looking on spoke blasphemous